UNFINISHED SYMPHONY

His music had made him a legend. A god, even.

MATILDE OLIVEIRA

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Sebastian Rook had spent a lifetime perfecting the art of music, honing every stroke of the bow, every delicate curve of his fingers on the strings. Music was his language. It was the air he breathed, the pulse that kept him alive. The violin wasn't just an instrument. It was a lover, a confidante, a sacred space where he could lose himself, and the world could do nothing but listen.

His music had made him a legend. A god, even. Audiences waited with bated breath for his every note, his every performance. And when he played, they knew it was more than just sound. It was an experience, every note aching with passion, every crescendo building to something untouchable. He was a master. A symphony in motion.

But one night, it all shattered.

The crash was everything and nothing. A blur of glass, of metal, of time slowing as his life careened from brilliance into dark, endless silence. When he woke, it wasn't the pain that hit him first, it was the emptiness. His right arm, the one that had once wielded the violin as an extension of himself, now hung uselessly by his side, a cold, dead weight. The doctors said it could heal. They gave him hope, told him he'd return to the stage in no time.

But Sebastian wasn't so naïve. The violin wasn't just muscle. It was mind, heart, soul. And when he reached for it, the strings only mocked him with their silence.

Days bled into weeks, and then months. Nothing changed. The world outside moved on, but he remained frozen in that single moment of impact. The sounds that once flowed through him, the music that had been his very essence, now suffocated him in its absence. Every morning, he woke with a bitter truth etched in his bones: Sebastian Rook, the man who had once captured the world with a single note, would never play again.

And then she appeared.

Dr. Simone Ellis.

His past, both a ghost and a whisper, standing before him. She had been the one who walked away. The one he'd never forgotten, though he had tried with everything in him to bury the memory of that night, the tequila, the too-close proximity, the way their bodies had gravitated toward each other like magnets, only for her to pull away at the last moment. He remembered the sharp sting of her rejection, the tension that had smouldered between them, a fire neither of them had been brave enough to fan.

Simone had taken a part of him with her when she disappeared. And now, after all this time, there she was, standing in front of him, eyes filled with something he couldn't name.

"Sebastian," her voice broke the stillness, and it was all at once familiar and foreign.

He didn't move, didn't speak for a long time. Her presence filled the room, an energy he couldn't escape, like a force of nature coming to test the ground he'd carefully built in her absence. He couldn't decide if he hated her for it, or if he wanted to fall into the trap of it.

"What are you doing here?" His voice was rough, harsh, not because of the pain in his arm, but because of the way she made him feel.

Simone stepped closer, not with pity, but with purpose. "I'm here to help you," she said, and it was that simple. But in the silence between them, the weight of her words was anything but simple. It was a declaration. A promise. A threat.

The past bled into the present with a ferocity he hadn't been prepared for. The walls he'd built around his pain, around his anger, started to crack. He could feel the tension between them like a cord pulled too tight, ready to snap.

"You're a therapist now?" he asked, his words dipped in something darker. "Come to fix me, Simone?"

Her gaze held him, steady, unwavering. "I didn't come here to fix you, Sebastian. I came to help you find your way back."

Her words lingered in the room, dancing on the edge of something dangerous, something he wasn't sure he was ready to face. And in that moment, he hated that she had the power to make him feel vul-

nerable. To make him ache with a desire he had buried for years.

She took a step closer, her eyes never leaving his. “I know it’s hard,” she whispered, voice soft yet firm. “But you don’t have to do this alone.”

He wanted to turn her away. He wanted to push her out, slam the door, and never look back. But that damn violin case on the shelf mocked him, its emptiness filling the space between them.

“I don’t need help,” he bit out, the words sharp like broken glass. But the truth was, he was drowning in the silence, in the weight of everything he’d lost.

Simone reached out, her fingers brushing his hand, barely a touch but it felt like a spark, an electricity that jolted through him. He stiffened at the contact, but she didn’t pull away. She held his gaze, unwavering.

“You do need help,” she said, the words so simple and yet profound, like a key turning in a lock he didn’t want to open.

He wanted to shout at her, to tell her to leave him alone. But something inside him wanted to break open, wanted to let her in. He had no idea if he could

trust her, but there was one thing he knew for sure: Simone Ellis was the only one who had ever truly understood him. And in that moment, she was the only one who could save him.

And though he hated it, though he resented her for bringing it all back, he knew deep down that he needed her. Needed her to heal. Needed her to help him find his way back to the music.

The past had never really left. It hovered between them, a tension that sizzled, a reminder of the night they had shared, of everything they could have been, of everything they still might become.

But first, there was the silence.

And it was in that silence that they would both have to learn how to speak again.

Notes in the Dark

The city lights shimmered like a field of stars below Sebastian Rook's apartment window, but they couldn't reach him, couldn't offer any answers. He stared at them anyway, eyes fixed, as if they might illuminate something in the darkness of his mind. The silence that had claimed his life since the accident pressed in around him like the weight of an oppressive storm, heavy and suffocating. It was a silence that had stolen his purpose, his identity, his music.

He could feel the absence of it, the absence of sound, the absence of rhythm, like a physical pain in his chest. His violin sat in its case across the room, a reminder of everything he'd lost, every note he would never play again.

A knock at the door shattered the stillness.

Sebastian didn't need to hear it twice. He knew who it was before she even spoke. Simone Ellis. Her presence was like an electric current, coursing through the air, touching him in places no one else could reach.

Simone...

He clenched his jaw, fighting the reflexive ache that gripped him at the thought of her. A part of him wanted to avoid this, wanted to remain in the safety of his misery. But another part of him, the part that had never quite been able to forget her, was drawn to the knock, like it was calling him home.

"Sebastian," her voice was soft, measured, the same as he remembered. That warmth that somehow made everything feel like it could be okay, if he just let it.

His heart skipped, and his pulse quickened despite himself. "Simone," he rasped, a hint of bitterness slipping through, though he didn't mean for it to.

It had been years. Years since they had been in the same room, and yet here she was, standing in front of him again. The woman who haunted his every waking moment, the woman who had always been just out of reach. His fingers flexed involuntarily at his sides,

remembering the feel of the violin beneath them, but he couldn't, wouldn't, let himself play again.

"I didn't ask for a therapist," he said, voice low, sharp, though the words felt as though they had been ripped from him.

She didn't flinch. Simone never flinched. Instead, her gaze held steady, unyielding. It was that same look she had given him years ago when they had first met. The same calmness that could extinguish any fire, soothe any storm. She had been the calm to his chaos, and now, despite everything, she still radiated that quiet certainty.

"I'm not here to be your therapist, Sebastian," she replied, each word deliberate, weighted. "I'm here to help you find your way back."

His throat tightened, the question that burned inside him threatening to break free. *Back to what?*

But he couldn't ask it. He wasn't sure he wanted to know. There were too many ghosts between them, too many things unsaid. He wasn't sure he could let her in again. He wasn't sure he wanted her to see him like this, broken and raw, the person he had been reduced to after the accident.

Simone stepped closer, closing the distance between them, until her presence was undeniable. Her gaze softened as it slid over him, his dark circles, the slump of his shoulders, the weakness in his posture that he could no longer mask. Her eyes lingered on the violin case in the corner of the room, and it felt like a thousand unsaid words passed between them in that instant.

"You don't have to speak," Simone said, her voice gentle but firm, the way she always spoke when she was trying to guide him to something he wasn't ready to face. Her fingers brushed lightly against his hand as she reached for him. The touch was nothing more than a whisper, but it felt like a surge of electricity, a spark that jolted him to life in places he didn't want to feel.

His breath hitched, and for a moment, he almost let himself fall into it. But then his own fears, his own anger, pulled him back. He stiffened, trying to distance himself from her touch, but he didn't pull away. He couldn't.

Her skin against his sent his pulse into overdrive, and for a brief, horrifying moment, he was back in college, back in that hotel room with her, their bodies close, the heat of their connection making everything

feel inevitable. *But you walked away*, he thought, the sharp edge of that memory cutting through him like a blade. *You left me.*

"I don't need help," he said, his voice hoarse now, and more bitter than he intended. "I'm fine."

The lie tasted worse than the truth, but he needed her to believe it. Needed her to walk away. Because if she didn't, if she stayed, then she might just be the one person who could break him all over again.

"I know you don't want to hear it," Simone murmured, the weight of her words so quiet, so precise. "But you do need help, Sebastian. You're not fine."

She stepped closer, her warmth enveloping him, her voice like a balm for the wound he couldn't heal. "You don't have to do this alone. Let me help you."

Her words wrapped around him like a thread, pulling him toward her. He could feel the raw truth in them, but it didn't make it any easier to accept. The walls he'd built around his heart, around his pain, felt as though they might crumble beneath her gaze.

Simone reached out again, her fingers brushing over his skin, so soft, so sure. And he hated himself for it, hated that her touch still had the power to make

him ache for things he had tried to forget.

But the music. The music he couldn't play. It haunted him. It was a phantom limb, one that had been severed from him, but still pulsed with life, still screamed for him to return to it.

She stood before him, the embodiment of the music he had lost. The woman who had once been everything to him, the one who had understood him in a way no one else ever had, and yet... he had pushed her away.

I'm not ready, he thought, the words forming on his lips, but his body betrayed him when he took a half-step forward. When he didn't pull away as she touched him again, this time her palm pressing against the side of his face, warm and steady.

"You don't have to speak," she repeated, her voice low, soothing. "Just let me help you find your way back to the music. To the person you used to be."

Sebastian's chest constricted, a mixture of longing and dread overwhelming him. *How could I ever go back?*

But for a moment, in that room, on the precipice between the past and the present—he allowed him-

self to believe her. To believe that maybe, just maybe, he could find his way back to something more than the hollow silence that had become his world.

And if he did?

He knew she would be the one to lead him there.

The Melody of Memory

The morning light cut through the blinds in harsh slats, the shadows in the room feeling like they were closing in around him. Sebastian Rook lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, watching the beams of light shift as the day grew. But it wasn't the light that made him restless. It was the night he had spent twisting, turning, unable to find sleep. The blank emptiness inside him kept him awake, the same emptiness that had been there since the accident.

His mind churned with the same questions, the same fears: *What if I can never play again?*

But it wasn't just that. It wasn't just the lost music.

It was her.

Simone.

He hadn't thought about her in years, not really. Not since everything had fallen apart, not since he had walked away. But last night, when her touch had lingered, when the warmth of her skin had pressed against his own, the floodgates had cracked open. He hadn't been able to stop it. The memory of her was sharp, vivid, every word she had whispered to him when they were young, every glance, every unspoken promise.

She had always been the one he couldn't get out of his head.

The knock at the door was quieter this time, but it still felt like a physical force. He rubbed his eyes, trying to shake off the haze of sleep, but it was useless. He knew who it was before the door even opened. Simone.

He stood up, his feet dragging, like he was walking through water, slow and heavy. His thoughts were still tangled, but he had to face her. There was no other choice.

She entered without a word, a soft smile on her lips, but it didn't reach her eyes. There was something too

sombre in her gaze, something he couldn't read but could feel in the way she looked at him. He could feel the weight of the years between them, the space they had left unspoken, unaddressed.

"Good morning," she said, her voice smooth but tinged with an edge he couldn't ignore. She closed the door behind her gently, as if not to disturb the fragile air between them.

He didn't return the smile. He couldn't. Not yet. Not until he figured out what the hell was going on inside of him.

Her eyes flickered to the violin case across the room, and for a moment, he swore he saw her breathe in, almost like she could smell the music that was no longer there. She was still the same woman who had been able to read him better than anyone else.

"Did you sleep?" she asked, her gaze meeting his once more, but this time there was a softness to her voice.

He wanted to lie, to tell her that it didn't matter, that he was fine. But they both knew that wasn't true.

"No," he said simply. "I don't sleep much anymore."

She nodded, like she'd expected it. "I figured."

Simone walked into the room like she belonged there, like she wasn't the woman who had walked out of his life years ago. She didn't carry a notebook or a clipboard like she usually would with clients. Today, there was nothing to indicate that she was here for anything other than him. She was just... Simone.

"I'm not going to push you to talk about the accident," she said, her voice steady but not cold. "I know you don't want to."

He stiffened, his jaw tightening. Her words hit him like a punch to the gut. *You don't want to talk about anything,* he thought bitterly, but he kept the thought to himself.

"I don't want to talk about anything," he muttered, turning away from her to face the window. The city was bustling below, a thousand lives unfolding while his own stood still. His fingers brushed the violin case lightly, his stomach twisting at the memory of what had once been his greatest love.

"I understand," she said, her voice quiet, but there was no pity in it. No judgment. Just... understanding. Like she had always understood him.

But that didn't make it easier. In fact, it only made it harder.

"I don't care about healing," he snapped, spinning around to face her, his voice rising before he could stop it. "I don't care about anything anymore. I was supposed to change the world with this." His hand swept out toward the violin case, gesturing to the instrument that had once been his entire world. "But I can't. I can't even hold it anymore."

The words were out before he could stop them, the raw bitterness and self-loathing spilling over. The air between them crackled, the tension thickening like a storm was about to break.

For a moment, Simone didn't move. She didn't flinch, didn't retreat. Instead, she took a single, measured step closer.

"I'm not asking you to change the world, Sebastian," she said softly. "I'm asking you to find yourself again."

Her words hung in the air, and something shifted inside him. Something cracked open, just a little. The walls he'd built around himself, around his pain, shuddered.

"I don't know if I can," he whispered. His voice was suddenly raw, vulnerable, in a way he hadn't allowed it to be in years.

"You don't have to do it alone," she whispered back, her hand extending, just a few inches from his shoulder. Her fingers hovered for a moment before landing gently on his skin. It was a light touch, but it felt like a lifeline, pulling him back from the abyss he'd been drowning in.

He sucked in a breath, his heart pounding as the sensation of her touch spread through him, setting his skin on fire. Her presence was overwhelming, and it was so damn familiar.

"I can't..." He shook his head, his voice thick. "I'm not the same person I was before the accident. I can't go back to that... to who I was."

Simone's expression softened, but there was a quiet resolve in her gaze. "You don't have to go back, Sebastian. You just have to find a way forward."

Her fingers slid down to the edge of his arm, and for a moment, the world outside them disappeared. The air between them thickened with the weight of what had been, and what might still be. He could feel

her heartbeat against his skin, could hear the rhythm of it in his own pulse.

And then, despite everything, despite the anger and the fear and the hurt, he found himself stepping closer.

"You don't have to do this," he murmured, his voice breaking. "You don't have to help me. You could just walk away. You could leave."

Simone didn't respond right away. She didn't have to. She was here, and that said more than any words ever could. She was offering him something he didn't think he could have—hope.

"I'm not going anywhere, Sebastian," she said, her voice steady, unshaken. "I'm here. For as long as you need me."

And as he looked into her eyes, something inside him cracked open, just a little more. The first hint of something like hope flared, and he felt it, for the first time in months.

Maybe, just maybe, he could find his way back.

Between the Strings

The days blurred into one another, moments of healing stitched together with moments of tension, fragile as a violin string stretched too tightly. Simone's presence in Sebastian's life had become a steady rhythm, a pulse that seemed to soothe the jagged edges of his soul. But every time their eyes met, it was like the strings between them vibrated, hummed with something unresolved, something that neither of them could deny anymore.

Tonight, the atmosphere in the room was thicker than usual. The gentle hum of the city outside faded into the background as they sat in the dim glow of his living room. The silence between them was never

really empty; it was full of things unsaid, of things that both of them were still too afraid to touch. But tonight, tonight felt different.

Simone stirred the coffee in her cup, the spoon clicking lightly against porcelain. She'd been quiet for too long, Sebastian could feel it in the way her fingers trembled around the mug. He watched her, the way the flicker of the candlelight reflected in her eyes, as if she was fighting something inside, something deep.

Finally, she spoke, her voice low, barely a whisper, but it cut through the tension in the room.

"I didn't come here for you, Sebastian."

Her words hit him like a chord struck wrong, dissonant and sharp. His chest tightened, his hand gripped the arm of his chair, but he didn't speak. He just waited, forcing himself to breathe.

"I came here for me." She looked up at him then, her eyes steady, unwavering. "To make up for what happened between us."

Sebastian's heart skipped a beat. Those words—those words he never thought he would hear again, rippled through him. The past surged back to him, the night they fell apart, the one moment that shat-

tered everything between them. The moment he had tried to bury, to ignore, but it was there now, too loud to silence.

"You never owed me anything," he rasped, the bitterness in his throat thickening. The words spilled out like they were cutting through him. "Not after what you did."

She flinched, but only for the briefest moment. It was so small, but to Sebastian, it felt like a crack in the wall between them. She could feel it too. The weight of the past. And he was just so damn tired of carrying it alone.

But then she straightened, meeting his eyes with a fire that had always been there, but now it was sharper, more dangerous.

"I know," she said, her voice calm, but each word held the weight of a thousand apologies. "But you need to understand, what happened between us, that night... it wasn't just about you. It was about me too. I ran, because I couldn't face what we were. What we could have been."

Sebastian's breath caught, his pulse quickened. She was here now. She had been here, coming back to

him in every way that mattered and still, he wasn't sure if he could trust her.

"Why now?" His voice was raw, strained. "Why after all this time?"

Simone's gaze softened, but there was an edge to her words now, a quiet resolve that neither of them could ignore.

"Because I don't want to keep running," she said, the confession hanging between them like a fine thread. "Because you... *you* ...deserve more than what I gave you before. You deserve someone who doesn't walk away."

He swallowed, the pain of her words digging deep into his chest. And still, a part of him wanted to pull away, to shut her out, but another part of him, the part he'd buried with his music, was aching to believe her.

"Are you saying... you want to fix this?" His voice was hoarse, as if it hadn't been used in years.

"I don't know if I can fix it," she said quietly, leaning forward. "But I know that I have to try. For both of us."

Her words were a balm, a soft touch that didn't heal but soothed the raw edges of him. The silence between them stretched, thick and charged, but this time, it wasn't suffocating. It was… promising.

Simone stood then, her movements slow and deliberate, as if each step was calculated, like she was walking toward something she wasn't sure she could reach. She stood in front of him, inches away.

"Sebastian," she murmured, her voice trembling like a note played too softly.

Before he could stop himself, he reached for her, his hands found her waist, pulling her closer, desperate for the connection that had always been there. Her breath hitched, but she didn't pull away. She let him.

"I can't do this," he whispered, the words thick with emotion. "I can't *not* do this."

Her hands rose to his chest, her fingers curling into the fabric of his shirt. "You don't have to do anything. Not yet."

But Sebastian wasn't sure he could wait. Not when the air between them was so thick with need, with something more than regret. He leaned in, slowly, cautiously, as if afraid she would disappear before his

very eyes. But when their lips met, it wasn't slow. It was urgent, filled with years of wanting, of longing, of pain that neither of them had ever let go of.

Her mouth was soft but demanding against his, and he groaned into the kiss, tasting the bitterness of the past and the sweetness of the present, both tangled together in the same breath. He pulled her tighter, feeling her heat, the way she fit against him, like she was always meant to.

Simone's hands tangled in his hair, pulling him closer, and for a moment, it was just them—no past, no accident, no brokenness, just two people who had loved each other in silence for too long.

When they finally broke apart, both of them were breathless, their faces flushed, their bodies still trembling from the intensity of the kiss.

"I never stopped loving you," he confessed, his voice thick with emotion.

Simone's hand slid to his cheek, her thumb brushing across the sharp line of his jaw. "I never stopped loving you either."

And with that, Sebastian knew, there was no going back. No more running. Not for either of them. The

music would come, or it wouldn't. But this ...*them* ...this was something worth fighting for. Something that neither of them could ignore anymore.

He pressed his forehead to hers, closing his eyes for just a moment. And then, with a quiet sigh, he whispered, "Let's not stop now."

And as the world outside continued to turn, inside this small apartment, the silence between them was filled with something sweeter than any melody he'd ever known. A promise. A beginning.

THE END

Unfinished symphony

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His music had made him a legend. A god, even.

Matilde Oliveira, a South American spitfire with a heart of gold and a drill bit for a tongue, juggles assisting at the local dentist's office with a burgeoning career as a romance novelist. Her short stories, filled with more cavities than a teenage sugar rush, explore the sweet and sometimes tooth-achingly painful world of love, romance and South American passion.

MATILDE OLIVEIRA